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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 002618

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [SO](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: Ali Mahdi on National Reconciliation Congress

Classified by PolOff Mitch Benedict for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On June 22 Ali Mahdi, Chairman of the National Governance and Reconciliation Committee, and other committee members and advisors briefed the Ambassador and Special Envoy on delegate selection for the Congress, his meetings with the Hawiye, the status of security service and the situation in Mogadishu, the Ethiopian presence, and the draft agenda. Mahdi admitted the NGRC had not yet dealt effectively with the media, and he thanked us for our assistance in producing materials and a strategy for media and public outreach. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador hosted Ali Mahdi, Chairman of the National Governance and Reconciliation Committee (NGRC), and other members and advisors to the NGRC for breakfast on June 22 to discuss preparations for the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC). Mahdi said the NRC was delayed from June 14 to July 15 because delegates had not been selected, the venue was not ready, and the "situation on the ground" (presumably security) was not yet conducive to holding the Congress. He said the plan now is to have all delegates arrive in Mogadishu by the end of June...or the first week of July.

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Delegate Selection  
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¶3. (C) Mahdi claimed that 70 percent of the delegate lists have been sent back from the regions. The NGRC is in the process of reviewing those lists. On initial review of submitted lists one thing that was immediately evident is that women are not being adequately selected as delegates. The intention was that a minimum of 20 percent of delegates would be women. Mahdi insisted that the NGRC told the elders of each clan that they must select women to be 20 percent of their delegates. He said the NGRC has told the clan elders that if they do not select women as required then the NGRC would do so in place of the top 20 percent of names on their list.

¶4. (C) The NGRC will establish a complaints committee. Mahdi said the NGRC currently has 20 elders advising the committee. The elders were not selected according to the 4.5 clan quota criteria, but as individuals, and they are called upon as needed. Out of this group of 20, Mahdi said, some would be selected to serve on a complaints committee that would be headed by a member of the NGRC.

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The Hawiye  
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¶5. (C) Mahdi opined that since the 1992 breakdown in central government 70 percent of the problems of Somalia have been Mogadishu-based, which means the Hawiye. He said he met with the Hawiye three times, in tough meetings, for the purpose of gaining their support for reconciliation and the NRC. He then met on June 20

with Abdi Imam, Chairman of the new 151-member Hawiye group, and four of his deputies. The purpose of meeting was to discuss why the Hawiye group was refusing to participate in the Congress.

¶16. (C) According to Mahdi, Imam said the Hawiye saw no reason to participate if the NRC was only about social reconciliation, because the problems they face are political. Mahdi assured Imam that the NRC would be about "everything" -- including political issues -- and Imam then allegedly replied that the Hawiye would participate. According to Mahdi, a ten person committee was to meet on June 23 to plan and prepare for a general meeting of the Hawiye to begin within a week. (Comment: As of mid-day on June 25 the committee of ten has not met. End Comment)

¶17. (C) Mahdi, his deputy and advisors, all voiced skepticism whether Abdi Imam's 151-member group represents the "real" Hawiye, implying that the group is dominated by the Haber Gedir, and in particular the Ayr, who oppose the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Mohamoud Jirdeh Hussein, Deputy Chairman of the NGRC, said 80 percent of the group had a "political" agenda. Mahdi, who is a Hawiye/Abgal, said a large meeting of the entire clan should resolve once and for all the question of what are the views and issues of the "genuine" Hawiye.

¶18. (C) Each of the six major sub-clans of the Hawiye -- Gaaljaal, Hawadle, Abgal, Murosade, Sheikal, and Haber Gedir -- will send 50 delegates to intra-Hawiye meeting. At such a gathering of 300 Hawiye representing all the clans, asserted Mahdi, the key issues will be discussed, and the clan as a whole will determine what is in their interest and how they wish to proceed. One group will not be able to dictate to the others, and the common interest should prevail.

¶19. (C) A problem, said Mahdi, is that the 151-member Hawiye group asked to participate in the NRC as a group, over and above the 250 seat allocation for the Hawiye clan. Given that each of the major clans is being allocated 250 seats, Mahdi told Imam it was not

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possible to accommodate this request, but he would try to accommodate some of them, perhaps up to ten including the Chairman and his deputies. The Suleiman, Sarur, and Duduble have all submitted their lists of delegates.

¶10. (C) When we asked who we should reach out to within the Hawiye/Haber Gedir/Ayr to encourage participation in the NRC and political dialogue Mahdi and his deputies disagreed among themselves as to who were the "real" decision-makers and influential figures. (Comment: this is a recurring problem. Many interlocutors are quick to label the latest Hawiye grouping as "not real," but when then asked who are the "real Hawiye" there is never a definitive reply. Our solution: talk with as many of the Hawiye as we can. End Comment)

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The Council of Islamic Courts  
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¶11. (C) Mahdi said on June 20 he called Ibrahim Addow, the former "foreign secretary" of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) now in self-imposed exile abroad, to invite members of the CIC to the Congress. The CIC is not and will not be invited as an organization, but Mahdi said he has an obligation to meet with and invite everyone as individuals, if they renounce violence. He told Addow he is prepared to meet with him, Sheikh Sharif (the former Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CIC), and others previously associated with the CIC at anytime, and anywhere, except in Asmara. Mahdi said "it would be good" if Addow and Sharif would participate in the Congress. However, Mahdi believes "something is holding Sharif back," and he speculated that it may be the extremists within the Shabaab.

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Ethiopia's Presence  
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¶12. (C) Somalia has a 200 year old issue with Ethiopia, said Mahdi. In 1996, Mahdi told the Ethiopians, who said they wanted to disarm

the Somalis and bring peace to the nation, that the only way to do that was with a mixed force, because Somalis would always view Ethiopian troops as a hostile occupying force. Ten years later the new threat of terrorism has complicated the issue and forced Ethiopia's hand. Ethiopia has done a good job, said Mahdi, but with such military actions there are always collateral effects, and Ethiopians have been involved in negative activities. Mahdi requested the U.S. to ask the Ethiopians to maintain strict discipline among their troops in Somalia to avoid negative actions and activities. Mahdi has spoken with Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum, and he is convinced they both are genuinely interested in the NRC succeeding.

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State of Somalia Security Services  
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¶13. (C) The business community, said Mahdi, particularly those who work in the Bakara market, would much rather have Ethiopian security services search them than Somalia services. The Ethiopians are more disciplined and efficient. The police are slightly better than the TFG army, but the army is "absolutely hopeless." If the outcome of the intra-Hawiye conference is positive then security will improve. Mahdi hoped that the Hawiye will begin to question why some elements may be harboring or assisting those who are assassinating their fellow clan members. Secondly, Mahdi said, how the government goes about disarmament will also greatly affect the overall security situation. The TFG needs to proceed in a way that does not increase opposition. Mahdi told us, "the U.S. needs to tell the TFG to stop the intimidation and alienation of the Somali people and use genuine police forces to patrol the city."

¶14. (C) Mahdi is not in favor of the curfew announced on June 19. He believes it to be another example of intimidation perpetrated against the people of Mogadishu, and that it is also illegal since the Parliament did not sanction it. However, he said, "Sometimes a strong hand is needed" and there are a lot of people creating security problems. Mahdi assured us he would take the issue up with President Yusuf. In the coming weeks leading up to the Congress we should expect attacks. Mahdi said attacks will increase because those opposed to reconciliation and a political process want to send a message that they must still be dealt with. Despite his caution, Mahdi claimed that the overall security situation is improving.

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Congress Agenda  
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¶15. (C) Following the meeting, Mahdi provided us with a provisional  
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draft eleven point agenda for the Congress. The agenda states that "the clans, through their traditional leaders, are charged with:

- adopting a communique in support of the National Reconciliation Congress.
- meeting with the nations leaders.
- discussing Somali unity.
- discussing and finding solutions to conflicts between and among Somali clans.
- discussing disarmament and the establishment of peace and security.
- discussion of return/repossession of property.
- discussion of the nature and impact of radical Islam.
- discussion of good governance including democratization, establishment of political parties, and census.
- discussion of sharing of national resources and observing power sharing as established in the Transitional Charter.
- assessment of the deliberations, and formulation of resolutions of the Congress.
- adopting an appeal for the Transitional Federal Institutions and the international community to support the Congress outcomes."

Mahdi stressed that the agenda is provisional, and that it would likely be modified as comments and ideas are developed by the NGRC teams that have traveled to the regions.

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Media Outreach  
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¶16. (C) Mahdi and his staff acknowledged that their weak point was dealing with the media and public outreach. However, Mahdi claimed the NGRC now has a media/communications unit and three people to staff it. We were told to expect much more frequent and regular public outreach from the NGRC. The Ambassador emphasized that we have long viewed an active public outreach campaign and strategy on the NRC as essential to ensure the success of the Congress. The Ambassador and Special Envoy stressed, as they have done on numerous occasions, that the more the NGRC can go on the airwaves to discuss and build support for the NRC the more opportunities it gives us to support them and the reconciliation process.

¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador provided Mahdi with a packet of materials that Embassy Nairobi's Military Information Support Team (MIST) and Public Affairs Office (with valuable TDY support from the Department) had produced for the NGRC. The packet included drafts of the following: a brochure, a t-shirt design, a bumper sticker, and a comprehensive media strategy. Mahdi promised to review the materials and provide his clearance so that printing and production can begin as soon as possible.  
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